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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003323

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: THE AMBASSADOR'S OCTOBER 4 MEETING WITH COR DEPUTY
SPEAKER KHALID ATTIYA

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The Ambassador used his Oct. 4 meeting with Sheikh Khalid Attiya, Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives (CoR), to underscore the need for political progress and for the 3 1 mechanism to work. Sheikh Khalid agreed, and said the de-Baathification reform law might receive its first reading within the next three days. He predicted that the draft provincial powers law would be put to a vote without further debate once it returns to the CoR from the Shura Council, but said the Kurds were blocking progress on the oil law. He stressed the need for PM Maliki to appoint technocrats to run the ministries of Health, Transportation, and Agriculture (previously held by Sadrists). Sheikh Khalid was politely scornful of VP Hashimi's "national compact," faulted Hashimi for any problems in the 3 1, and said that Tawafuq's continued refusal to return to the government would lead to a crisis. He confirmed his acceptance of an MNF-I invitation to visit Saydiya to see first-hand the status of the Concerned Local Citizens (CLCs) program there. He was skeptical of the Jaysh al-Mahdi ceasefire. End summary.

The Ambassador's Message

12. (C) In an October 4 meeting with Sheikh Khalid Attiya, Deputy Speaker of the CoR, the Ambassador underscored the urgent need for political progress. "We've bought some time," said the Ambassador, who cited recent security gains and the efforts made by Iraq's political leaders in late August. He added: "Now we have to use this time to make political progress over the next few months." He stressed the role that the 3 1 mechanism (i.e., the Presidency Council and the Prime Minister) could play and said the U.S. expected to see renewed efforts after Eid. He also emphasized the need for the GOI to focus on improving the delivery of basic services, saying that the Iraqis needed to bring the same level of energy and determination to that "civil campaign" as they had to the military campaign of Fardh al-Qanoon.

Legislative Update

13. (C) Sheikh Khalid agreed, saying there was a somewhat improved atmosphere in the CoR following the August recess, and noting that attendance was up, with no less than 206 members present at the October 4 session. He said that the de-Ba'athification reform law could receive its first reading within the next three days. As for provincial powers, he predicted that the draft law would go straight to its third reading once it returns from the Shura Council and would be voted on without further debate. He noted that there were a few outstanding points to be resolved (e.g., salary levels for provincial officials) and even some remaining disagreements within the UIA, but indicated that these would not be deal-breakers. In contrast, Sheikh Khalid said the

oil law was still being blocked by the Kurds, who were insisting that the current draft be stripped of all appendices (i.e., a return to the February 2006 draft).

Sheikh Khalid's Priority: Fix Cabinet

¶4. (C) Sheikh Khalid said that the GOI had a "great opportunity" to appoint new cabinet ministers to posts vacated by the Sadrists, Iraqiya and Tawafuq. He said that rather than trying to replace all the vacant cabinet jobs, PM Maliki should focus on the critical ministries of Health, Transportation and Agriculture and should nominate technocrats not beholden to any particular political party. "We need to get away from the party quota system," said the Deputy Speaker. Returning to this theme later in the conversation, Sheikh Khalid added: "We must fix the government (i.e., cabinet) before trying to pass laws -- the laws will follow naturally afterwards."

VP Hashimi: The Fly in the 3 1 Ointment?

¶5. (C) Turning to Vice President (VP) Hashimi's recent visit to Najaf (during which Hashimi claims to have sold Grand Ayatollah Sistani on his proposed "national compact"), Sheikh Khalid noted that Sistani spoke in generalities after the meeting -- the implication being that Sistani had not given Hashimi's plan any specific blessing. The Ambassador noted US dissatisfaction with a couple of points in the proposal, especially its references to the "occupation" of Iraq. Later in the conversation, responding to the Ambassador's point that mutual understanding and trust among the 3 1 members would facilitate progress, Sheikh Khalid said: "Let me be frank -- Hashimi's role makes reaching an understanding

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difficult. Even his friends in the Iraqi Islamic Party complain about his dictatorial style." Continuing on this theme, Sheikh Khalid observed that the negative atmosphere generated by Hashimi's comments about the GOI's performance did not help matters. The GOI is in a difficult period; it is very easy under the circumstances for someone to identify mistakes and focus media attention on them. The Ambassador assured Sheikh Khalid that he made this very point to VP Hashimi earlier in the day.

¶6. (C) Ratcheting his argument up a notch, Sheikh Khalid said that the status quo was unsustainable: the GOI must resolve the question of Tawafuq's return to the unity government, or the country would face a crisis. "If they (Tawafuq) have specific requests, then fine. But if not, they should let the government get on with its work," he said.

Saydiya and Sadrists

¶7. (C) The Ambassador noted the recent misunderstandings surrounding the situation in Saydiya and the role played there by CLCs, and said that an October 4 visit to Saydiya organized by MNF-I for leading Shia political figures (including PM Advisor Sami al-Askari and Badr Commander Hadi al-Amari) should help to dispel the misconceptions. Sheikh Khalid confirmed that he planned to join a follow-up MNF-I visit on October 6 and said that the situation in Saydiya was of real concern to the PM and other Shia politicians. "They are worried about (the U.S.) arming militias that are outside the law . . . even if they are not a threat now, what about in the future?" he asked rhetorically. The Ambassador clarified that the US is not/not arming the CLCs, and is working in close coordination with the GOI and especially the Implementation and Follow-up Committee on National Reconciliation (IFCNR). The Ambassador acknowledged the need to proceed deliberately, and noted that after having discussed the program in some detail with the PM and Gen. Petraeus earlier in the day, the PM was comfortable with the

situation.

¶18. (C) Sheikh Khalid said he doubted that the JAM ceasefire represented a serious effort by Muqtada al-Sadr to reform the Sadrist trend/JAM. "The Sadrist trend is a mix of many things; Muqtada al-Sadr is just one wing inside a group of many wings," he said. Consequently, even though he thought it obligatory to go through the motions of welcoming the ceasefire and trying to nurture it into something meaningful, Sheikh Khalid remained skeptical of the ceasefire's practical import. Moreover, he argued that the GOI and Coalition Forces should continue to hit "certain JAM elements" that did not observe the ceasefire. "We can't allow organizations to carry weapons and challenge the government -- we must confront this situation with force," said the Sheikh.

CoR Member Gets the Boot

¶19. (C) Sheikh Khalid gleefully recounted how the CoR, at Tawafuq's behest, had voted earlier in the day to strip Abdul Nasr al-Janabi of his membership in the Council. (Al-Janabi, who is currently outside of Iraq, is a prominent defender of the Sunni insurgency.) "They (Tawafuq) wanted to let him submit his resignation, but of course there was no written letter of resignation and besides, allowing him to resign would mean that he kept his pension. So we voted him out," chuckled the Deputy Speaker, who noted that none of this would have been possible if not for the fact that CoR Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani is currently out of the country. Sheikh Khalid said that al-Janabi's seat has been awarded to former Iraqi soccer star Ahmed Rathi.

Comment

¶10. (C) A first reading of the de-Baath law this week would be a welcome development, although given the CoR's track record we are taking Sheikh Khalid's prediction with a grain of salt. Perhaps more noteworthy is his assessment that the new draft of the provincial powers law will not re-set the legislative clock; because a previous draft of the law has already been through two readings in the CoR, it appears that the version approved by the leaders will move (once it returns from the Shura Council) straight to a third and final reading and vote. Post will continue to track both bills and use every engagement with CoR members to emphasize the need for rapid passage.
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